C. Executive Summary 7. Executive Summary of Overall Proposal:

Statement of the Problem:

Baxter and the surrounding counties (Marion, Fulton, Izard, Searcy, and Stone in Arkansas, and Ozark County in Missouri) are remote, rural areas that are underserved in terms of broadband access. Poverty levels, even before the recession, were above the national average; per capita income in Baxter County was below $25,000, and just above $20,000 for surrounding counties. Even where broadband access is available, it is not affordable for many.

Overall Approach:

Mountain Home, located in Baxter County, is a market center for the area with substantial numbers of people from surrounding counties either working, shopping, or seeking medical treatment. A new 35,500 sq. ft. public library is currently under construction with completion expected in June, 2010. We propose to expand the physical capacity of the public computer center in the new facility by increasing the number of broadband access workstations from the current 17 to 56 and the number of hours they are available to from 53 to78 per week. An upgrade to the public computer center at the Gassville Branch Library is included, increasing the number of workstations there from two without broadband access to five with broadband access, and the number of hours they are available from 24 to 51. We propose to use the computer lab in Mountain Home to provide informal training and hands-on assistance for those who are not familiar with computers or the Internet. It will also be available for those who need to use it to find employment, for online training to upgrade job skills, maintain certifications, or further their education. We will also use the public computer center lab to provide workshops for small businesses on how to locate and use Internet resources to explore new markets, develop web pages, and how to use popular software applications to improve efficiency. Wireless broadband access will be available in both locations for those who have laptops but cannot afford the service. The final component is a campaign to generate awareness and stimulate use of the new broadband technology.

Qualifications:

Baxter County Library is well qualified to implement this project, having utilized grants and donations to provide computers with Internet access for public use since 1998. The number of public computers has grown from the initial four to 17 currently. A few years ago wireless access was added at both locations. We already have policies in place that govern public computer use; we understand the problems and issues that can arise from the provision of this service; and we have the experience to deal with new ones. Within the past three years we have prepared our organization to occupy a much larger facility by upgrading and adding staff.

Jobs to be saved or created:

This proposal will create five FTE jobs; three of which will likely remain after the project funding ends.

Overall cost:

The overall cost of this proposal is $1,277,240, with $771,250 of it from BTOP funds matched by $505,990 in local and other funds, making a 65% match for every dollar of federal funding received. ████████████████████████████████████

█